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HEAD QUARTERS ARMIES OF THE CONFEDERATE STATES,
22nd February, 1865.

GENERAL:

The spirit which animates our soldiers, and the national courage with which they are so liberally endowed, have led to a reliance upon their good qualities to the neglect of those measures which would increase their efficiency and contribute to their safety. Many opportunities have been lost, and hundreds of valuable lives uselessly sacrificed for want of a strict observance of discipline.

Its object is to enable an army to bring promptly into action the largest possible number of its men, in good order and under the control of their officers. Its effects are visible in all military history, which records the triumphs of discipline and courage far more frequently than those of numbers and resources.

At no time in the war has the necessity of close attention to this important subject been greater than at present, and at no time has its cultivation promised more valuable results. The proportion of experienced troops is larger in our army than in that of the enemy, while his numbers exceed our own. These are the circumstances most favorable for the display of the advantages of discipline, and in which the power it imparts will be most clearly perceived.

I desire therefore that you will direct every effort to improve the discipline of your troops. This will not only require your own unremitting attention, but also the zealous cooperation of your officers, commissioned and non-commissioned.

The recent law abolishing the system of elections, and opening the way to promotion to all who distinguish themselves by the faithful discharge of duty affords a new incentive to officers and men. In addition to the usual and stated instructions, which must be given at all times as fully as circumstances will permit, the importance and utility of thorough discipline should be impressed on officers and men on all occasions, by illustrations taken from the experience of the instructor, or from other sources of information. They should be made to understand that discipline contributes no less to their safety than to their efficiency. Disastrous surprises

Loe Foulson.
Lt. Loe Carter.

and those sudden panics which lead to defeat and the greatest loss of life, are of rare occurrence among disciplined troops. It is well known that the greatest number of casualties occur when men become scattered, and especially when they retreat in confusion, as the fire of the enemy is then more deliberate and fatal. The experience of every officer shows that those troops suffer least who attack most vigorously, and that a few men, retaining their organization and acting in concert accomplish far more with smaller loss, than a larger number scattered and disorganized.

The appearance of a steady, unbroken line is more formidable to the enemy, and renders his aim less accurate, and his fire less effective. Orders can be readily transmitted, advantage can be promptly taken of every opportunity, and all efforts being directed to a common end, the contest will be briefer and success more certain.

Let officers and men be made to feel that they will most effectually secure their safety, by remaining steadily at their posts, preserving order, and fighting with coolness and vigor.

Fully impressed with the truth of these views, I call your attention particularly to the accompanying order with reference to the duties of file closers, which you will immediately carry into execution.

Impress upon your officers that discipline cannot be attained without constant watchfulness on their part. They must attend to the smallest particulars of detail. Men must be habituated to obey, or they cannot be controlled in battle, and the neglect of the least important order impairs the proper influence of the officer.

In recommending officers or men for promotion you will always, where other qualifications are equal, give preference to those who show the highest appreciation of the importance of discipline, and evince the greatest attention to its requirements.

Very respectfully, your obed't serv't,

R. E. LEE,
General.

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